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ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated that African-American students, particularly those from low-income environments tend to be at greater risk for low academic achievement. However, income level is only one factor that contributes to low academic achievement. This study investigated the influence of other factors, including parental use of nurturant behavior and child household duties on the academic performance of at-risk African-American students. Data was obtained from a subset utilized in the National Survey of Family and Household (NSFH) data, consisting of African-American families with at least one child aged 5-18. Respondents provided information on a total of 566 students. Nurturance, control, demand, punishment, and household responsibilities were selected as the independent variables. These variables were comprised of composite scores on relevant items from the NSFH questionnaire. The analysis suggests that both high nurturance or high punishment are important for academic success. However, the best combination appears to be high nurturance and high punishment. The worst combination is clearly, low nurturance with low punishment. Although rigid control and high expectations of obedience may seem severe for middle America, such measures may be in the best interest of the child in certain environments, such as high poverty areas. As predicted child household responsibilities were negatively related to academic performance. More insight is needed on parental influences and the distribution of household responsibilities that promote academic resilience. The variables associated with positive academic outcomes for these resilient African-American students need to be isolated and analyzed. (ABL)

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Influence of Parental Style and Child Duties on School Performance of African-American Students

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Running Head: School Performance

ABSTRACT

Previous research has indicated that African-American students, particularly those from low-income environments tend to be at greater risk for low academic achievement. However, income level is only one factor that contributes to low academic achievement. The present study investigated the influence of other factors, including parental use of nurturant behavior and child household duties on the academic performance of at-risk African-American students. Multiple regression revealed that greater use of parental nurturant behavior, punishment and fewer household responsibilities significantly contribute to the academic resilience of these students.

Influence of Parental Style and Child Household Duties on School Performance of African-American Students

In a changing society, where the gap between skilled and unskilled labor continues to grow, self sufficiency for many African-Americans remains elusive. Children spend an average of twelve years in pursuit of an education in order to attain the skills necessary for survival. Previous investigations have indicated that African-American students from low-income areas tend to be at-risk in traditional academic settings.

However, income level is only one factor that contributes to low academic achievement. It has also been well documented that factors such as prior school performance, behavior and attitudes correctly predict dropout with 70%-80% accuracy (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Another factor that may exacerbate the problem is the evolving nature of the family. Transitional life events such as death, divorce and unemployment have had serious ramifications on familial life (McLoyd, 1990). Most of the emphasis in previous research has been given to the effect these changes have had on parental functioning. Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of research and literature regarding the influence these changes have had on the African-American child.

It has been well established that African-American children, especially those residing in single-parent homes, assume greater responsibility at an earlier age (Weiss, 1979). In addition past research has shown that in homes with both parents, the hierarchy in terms of work distribution is typically, mother, followed by children and lastly father (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). However, despite these findings the role of

disproportionate household responsibility continues to be ignored as a contributing factor to poor academic performance in African-American students.

The present study explores the relationship between parental behavior, child household responsibility and subsequent school performance. It was hypothesized that children with fewer household responsibilities would perform better academically. It was also hypothesized that students whose parents employed a nurturant disciplinary style would perform better in school than their counterparts whose parents utilized harsher methods of discipline.

METHODS

Subjects

Data was obtained from a subset utilized in the National Survey of Family and Household data, collected between March 1987 and May 1988. This dataset is a multi-stage probability sample of 13,017 families responding to a randomly selected screening of households from 100 areas in the United States. The main sample was comprised of 9,643 primary respondents with a double sampling of understudied populations. After the initial screening, the respondents were interviewed in several stages. The main interview contained 671 questions, including a 64-item self administered questionnaire.

In the present investigation, analyses were limited to African-American families. Of the 1,996 African-American families identified in the data with children under 18, only those with at least one child in the target age group (5-18) were selected. Respondents provided information for a total of 566 students.

Variables

Nurturance, control, demand, punishment and household responsibilities were selected as the independent variables. These variables were comprised of composite scores on relevant items from the 64-item NSFH questionnaire. The dependent variable examined was academic outcome.

Nurturance involved questions regarding the frequency of parents hugging and praising the child and time spent reading to and playing with the child. The variable control consisted of questions regarding parental expectation of child keeping self busy, doing well artistically and athletically, and trying new things. Questions regarding demand included parental expectations of child doing as he or she is asked, being kind, doing well in school, carrying out responsibilities, following rules and getting along well with others. The punishment variable referred to the frequency of spanking and yelling directed at the child. Child household responsibility was comprised of the four chores: washing dishes, cleaning house, outdoor tasks and washing and ironing.

The dependent variable in this study was academic outcome. This was measured according to how well the parent perceived the child was doing in school. A ranking of 1 (student is doing very poorly, mostly F's) to 5 (student is doing very well, mostly A's) was used.

Model Analyses

In order to determine whether data was randomly or nonrandomly missing, logistic regression was performed. This procedure indicated that the data was randomly missing.

Composite scores on the relevant questionnaire items were used for the variables control, demand, punishment and chores. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the variables parental control, nurturance, demand, punishment and chores predict the academic outcome of the student, or grades.

RESULTS

Multiple regression revealed a significant negative relationship between household responsibilities and academic performance, beta = -.179, t = -2.629, F = 12.414, p < .009. (See TABLE 1). The more household responsibilities a child performed the poorer his or her academic performance.

The analyses indicated that an interaction between parental nurturance and punishment was a significant predictor of academic outcome, beta = .269, t = 3.944, F = 17.388, p < .001. (See TABLE 1).

Insert TABLE 1 Here

See TABLE 2 for Pearson Product Correlation analysis results.

Insert TABLE 2 Here

For the interaction between parental nurturance and punishment, four outcomes were possible. For "high nurturance, high control", the academic achieve mean equalled 3.42. For "high nurturance, low control", the mean equalled 3.13. "Low nurturance, high

control" yielded a mean of 3.04. "Low nurturance, low control" yield a mean of 2.55. (See TABLE 3)

Insert TABLE 3 Here

TABLE 4 provides the mean and standard deviation information for the variables used. (See TABLE 4)

Insert TABLE 4 Here

Scheffee's post hoc comparison showed that the academic achievement mean of "high nurturance, high control" is greater than "low nurturance, high control" and "low nurturance, low control". "Low nurturance, high control" is greater than "low nurturance. low control". In addition, "high nurturance, low control" is greater than "low nurturance, low control". There was no significant difference between "high nurturance, high control" and "high nurturance, low control", nor between "low nurturance, high control" and "high nurturance, low control".

Furthermore, no significant relationship between academic performance and parental demand or parental control was revealed.

DISCUSSION

The data suggests that both high nurturance or high punishment are important for academic success. However, the best combination appears to be high nurturance and high punishment. The worst combination is clearly, low nurturance with low punishment.

Previous research has suggested that while African-American parents tend to be more punitive or restrictive, they also tend to be highly nurturant (Baumrind, 1973; Lee, 1985). Peters (1985) noted that the direct, physical disciplinary style has been regard has "harsh, rigid, and egocentrically motivated". However, the punitive behavior of African-American parents appears to be balanced by their nurturant behavior. The result appears to be beneficial for the child at least academically.

Although rigid control and high expectations of obedience may seem severe for middle America, such measures may be in the best interest of the child in certain environments, such as in areas of high poverty. Parents may actually protect the child from the various dangers associated with life in the ghetto by using stricter measures.

As predicted child household responsibilities were negatively related to academic performance. Children who were responsible for more chores were less successful academically. It is possible that time spent helping around the house detracts from time spent doing school work. The results suggest an overlooked possible explanation for poor academic performance. In other words, poor academic performance may not be a reflection of true ability or lack thereof.

More insight is needed on parental influences and the distribution of household responsibilities that promote academic resilience. The variables associated with positive

academic outcomes for these resilient African-American students need to be isolated and analyzed, providing a foundation for the implementation of supplemental educational programs, school reform, and other avenues that may be used to address the needs of at-risk African-American students.

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TABLE 1

Regression Analysis of the Independent Variables
On Academic Outcome

	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square
Regression	2	31.23229	15.61614
Residual	193	242.76771	1.25786

	Variables in the Equation				
0Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig T
NP	.010776	.002732	.268628	3.944	.0001
C1	-.023485	.008933	-.179050	-2.629	.0093
(Constant)	2.410892	.249262		9.672	.0000

F= 12.415 p< .001 R Square= .114 Standard Error= 1.122

TABLE 2

Pearson Product Correlations of Academic Outcome
With the Independent Variables

	Outcome	Nurturance	Control	Demand	Duties	Punishment
Academic outcome	1.000					
Nurturance	.251**	1.000				
Control	-.060	.056	1.000			
Demand	-.012	.123**	.486**	1.000		
Duties	-.176**	-.082	.009	.043	1.000	
Punishment	.162**	.188**	.018	-.031	-.088	1.000

N= 566
* = significance < .05 ** = significance < .01

TABLE 3

Means of Academic Outcome by Nurture*Punishment

Nurturance*Punishment	Mean	Std Dev.	N	Percent
High nurturance, high control	3.4182	1.1298	220	41.35
High nurturance, low control	3.1282	1.2563	117	21.99
Low nurturance, high control	3.0388	1.0565	103	19.36
Low nurturance, low control	2.5543	.9985	92	17.29
TOTAL	3.1316	1.1618	532	

TABLE 4

Overall Means and Standard Deviations of Academic Outcome
And the Independent Variables

Variables	Mean	Std Dev
Academic outcome	3.1090	1.1621
Nurturance	16.0914	3.2553
Control	20.9665	4.7440
Demand	38.0277	4.6668
Duties	10.4535	10.3439
Punishment	4.9274	1.3329